

Testimony from Bridgeport, CT for the State Public Hearing on 12/9/09 Regarding the Commission on Children & Parent Trust Fund

I submit this testimony as a concerned parent, voter, and taxpaying resident of Bridgeport. I join with other constituents, particularly parent leaders throughout our state to request our state representatives and senators restore funding to our state budget for the education, health and safety of our children. Of particular concern is the proposed elimination of the Commission on Children which has diligently lead on state prevention, bullying, school readiness, poverty, health and family issues and policies that impact our non voting but most valuable residents of our state-children. Please do not allow for the elimination of the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund. Our state can't afford to balance the budget on the backs of our children.

Since 1997, (12 years) Bridgeport parent and community leaders and organizations such as the Parent Center, RYASAP, and Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children, Bridgeport Public Education Fund and Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition have collaborated with the Commission on Children to offer the Parent Leadership Training Institute. In those 12 years parents have graduated to become community leaders serving in various capacities including City Commissioners, Community Council officers, Board of Education Appointee, School District and local Parent Advisory Council officers, Board Chair and members of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition and other organizations. Graduates have successfully implemented community projects to prevent teen pregnancy, increase family literacy, promote healthy living and wellness for children and parents, support education via advocacy, after-school programs, and provision of school supplies, mentor and tutor children, increase community awareness and collaboration of resources, clean up and revitalize a city neighborhood, park and tennis courts. Many of these volunteer projects were done in partnership with city and school officials and other community organizations that care for our children. Examples of longstanding volunteer endeavors include:

- Wentfield Park Revitalization where 100-200 families use the park regularly from April-October, district high schools can now use the park for football and track practice, local adult and little league baseball games are held there and 15 organizations and agencies use the park for community activities.
- A Community Project for Children Committed to DCF, a website dedicated to providing resources and information to family caregivers and other legal guardians to support the successful transition of children in foster care.
- Since 2003 a PLTI graduate has volunteered over 26,000 hours as a school district and community advocacy group parent leader/officer.
- Another graduate of PLTI collected and distributed over 1,000 books to children from low-incomes families.

As you all know the rate of child poverty in Bridgeport is more than twice the statewide rate and 50% higher than the national rate. In 2006 over 10,000 children in Bridgeport were living in poverty. Bridgeport PLTI seeks to enable parents to become change agents and leading advocates for these children and others. We ask you our legislators to

join us as leading child advocates to secure the funding for the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund who help to make Bridgeport PLTI possible. In considering the amount of money involved remember that the COC cost less than \$1.30 per child in CT and through the Parent Trust Fund the state has an opportunity to gain matching dollars of approximately \$250,000 through a public private partnerships to support quality parent engagement including People Empowering People, Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, Family Voices and the Parent Leadership Training Institute throughout the state. Moreover, the **Commission on Children** is the **only revenue generating** statewide commission and that this year alone they helped to bring over **9 million dollars in SNAP E & T Funds to our state**. Yet, however, they have been cut by 63% of their budget and now are threatened with total elimination. Please do not allow this to happen.

The proposed Governor's cuts to children centered systems, agencies, initiatives, and commissions are too costly a measure in your efforts to balance the budget. The ultimate price is the drastic and long lasting impact on our children who cannot and should not be told that they have to incur these expenses. I urge the Bridgeport Delegation and all legislators not to charge the quality of life account of our children once again. Although children are amazingly resilient we as adults still have an obligation and responsibility to ensure their well being.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted by: Donna Thompson-Bennett
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